

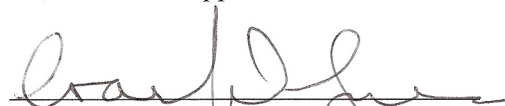
# Bloomsbury and the Natural World


by

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## CHAPTER 1

### “A Sound Like a Vast Breath”

#### An Introduction

*The Tate Britain Companion to British Art* states, “The Bloomsbury Group ... was about a whole attitude rather than a place to live and work” (175). The members were quite diverse, each being involved in various pursuits in the fields of art, politics, and writing. As such, it is difficult to categorize the members together into a single unit embodying a definitive perspective. A recurring theme that does appear in all of their works, though, is nature. Nature plays an essential part in the art and writing of the Bloomsbury Group. Virginia Woolf wrote extensively about nature, perhaps not always overtly, but she includes many latent references to it within her narratives. Her husband, Leonard, also wrote about the interconnectedness of man and nature in his stories, both fiction and non-fiction. E.M. Forster wrote novels, plays, short stories, essays, and radio broadcasts for the BBC. Many of these works dealt directly with nature and the destruction of nature by man. David Garnett also wrote several stories that touch on these same themes. They all examined the questions of where man fits into nature; why man harbors seemingly innate feelings about nature—either fearful or pleasurable; and what is the definition of civilized man within nature. The artists Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Roger Fry, and Dora Carrington explored these topics in their paintings and artwork as well. I wish to understand why the group felt it was important to devote so much time to the subject of nature. This paper will consider their intimate connection with nature and

look into the important role that it plays in the art and literature of the Bloomsbury Group.

Except for the growing amount of scholarship on the subject of Virginia's writing and the various themes of nature found in her more popular novels, very little academic work has been done on this topic. In view of the fact that Virginia, together with Maynard Keynes, is one of the two most internationally recognized members of the group, her extensive oeuvre has received the most attention. The Twentieth Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf, hosted by Georgetown College in Georgetown, Kentucky (June 3-6, 2010), was actually titled *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World*.

Numerous books have been written about the group; some sources, such as scholar S.P. Rosenbaum, being more credible than other sources. However, in light of their obvious fascination with, or appreciation of, nature, I found relatively little that explored this relationship in detail, and included the entire group. There have also been several magnificent, engaging books on the main locations of the Bloomsbury Group: Charleston Farmhouse, Monk's House in Rodmell, and of course, the Bloomsbury district of London, from which the group received its name. These books tend to be filled with beautiful photographs of the homes and gardens, and include wonderful stories of the shared histories of the inhabitants of these locales.

Although all of the members had country homes, for the sake of brevity, I focus more on some members than others, even though all contributed distinctive qualities to the atmosphere of this group. Others members and locations will be mentioned, but not in depth. I do not wish to shortchange Vanessa's husband Clive Bell, for he has much to

contribute to the conversation, especially on the topics of civilization and art. He was a reputable art critic of the time and he wrote several books including *Art* and *Civilization*.

My paper is comprised of four sections: The Introduction, Joy in the Garden, Fear in the Garden, and the Conclusion. In the second section, I will focus on the joy and pleasure that the Bloomsberries found in nature. They owned homes in the English countryside and London, but also traveled to many countries for pleasure and artistic inspiration. Monk's House and Charleston Farmhouse in East Sussex are the two main sites that I will discuss in this section. The third section addresses the Victorian fear of nature, where it stemmed from and what forces were at work to keep it alive. The conclusion will hopefully bring fresh insight into the academic conversation concerning Nature and The Bloomsbury Group. This paper will be different from other works in that it encompasses all of Victorian culture: literature, art, gardening, and social customs, as they relate to the Bloomsbury Group as a collective entity. Although these other works are valuable, they do not contain the cultural dimensions of my paper. My personal research at the King's College Archives, Cambridge University, and The Tate Britain Museum Archives in London, coupled with the generous gift of time given to me by the many remaining family members and close friends of the Bloomsbury Group, transformed this final project into the journey of a lifetime. It is my hope that I am not only able to pass on what I have learned but also to start a conversation that challenges the present way we think about nature and the environment using this group of friends as inspiration.



## CHAPTER 2

### **“Good Air and Quiet”: The Pleasures of “Seeing Life” in the Country**

Virginia and Vanessa Stephen, as well as their brothers, Thoby and Adrian, were immersed in nature from a young age. They engaged in family nature studies, such as collecting moth and insect specimens, bird watching, gardening, and sowing seeds. Their father, Leslie Stephen was an avid mountaineer and led the family on vigorous walking excursions. Hermione Lee, Virginia’s biographer, says that as a child, Leslie was described as taking pleasure in birds and flowers (Lee 69). He allowed his own children to have many childhood pets and insisted the family spend the summer months in the country. In a letter to his wife, Julia, he writes of their country home in St. Ives, Talland House, “The children will be able to run straight out of the house to a lovely bit of sand and have good air and quiet” (25). Lee further explains, “All the children would learn to swim, the boys would get boating and fishing, and he would be able to go off on his great walks with bread and cheese in his pockets” (25). The garden was one of the first things Leslie noticed when he purchased Talland House in 1883. In letters written to his daughter, Laura, and Julia he describes its bounty: “quantities of new potatoes” and “grapes and strawberries and peaches” (29). He also wrote to Julia that he saw “lots of primroses and bluebells and anemones” (29). A letter to a Mrs. Clifford states, “It is so clear that we see thirty miles of coast. We have a little garden...lawns surrounded by flowering hedges and intricate thickets of gooseberries and currants, and remote nooks of potatoes and peas, and high banks, down which you can slide in a sitting posture, and corners in which you come upon unexpected puppies—altogether a pocket paradise”

(29). Leslie Stephen gave his children the best experiences of nature during their summers at St. Ives. Virginia would write fifty years later that those summers made for “the best beginning to life conceivable” (31).

In *Sketches in Pen and Ink*, Vanessa remembers playing in Kensington Park. She and Virginia would take their books and some Fry chocolate to the park and lie on the grass under the trees on summer afternoons (65). Another early memory is of her and her siblings “finding the deserted corpse of a dog—a little black dog” (57). Kensington Park was also where she, at age twelve, was walking and enjoying the sight of the trees and the gardens, and realized suddenly and “quite certainly that religion meant nothing to [her] and that never again need [she] bother about it” (105). Nature provided freedom and exploration of thought to her and Virginia even as young girls. They were not brought up with the Victorian fear and distrust of nature, but taught to enjoy it and learn from it. This rapport with the natural world is made clear in their earliest memories.

Virginia’s intense connection with nature is evident in her early journals. While spending the summer of 1903 at the Stephens’ country residence, Netherhampton House, Virginia wrote these words in her journal, *A Passionate Apprentice*:

We have become absorbed by the spirit of Nature, let us say—a vast quantity of it is distilled by these fields & downs; we inhale it peacefully. We spend so much of our time out of doors too, that we become sensitive to the various changes of temperature...the wonderful rise & swell & fall of the land. It is like some vast living thing, & all its insects & animals, save man, are exquisitely in time with it. If you lie on the earth somewhere you hear a sound like a vast breath, as though it were the very inspiration of earth herself, & all the living things on her (203).

This young girl of twenty-one has a keen insight into the natural world, as demonstrated by the seemingly insignificant sentence in the above quote: “It is like some

vast living thing, & all its insects, save man, are exquisitely in time with it” (203). Like Charles Darwin, she categorizes man as an animal. That is a profound revelation coming from such a young woman of the times. Even then, Virginia places man in his rightful place among nature, not above nature, and certainly not in charge of nature.

Henrietta Garnett, Vanessa’s granddaughter, credits Leslie with introducing and fostering this love of nature in his children. In addition, she said that despite his characterization as an impossible, screaming, controlling brute, he fully supported his daughters’ creative pursuits and helped them to achieve full potential in their talents. This was quite progressive thinking at this time (H. Garnett).

Leonard Woolf also had an early affection for the outdoors and nature, as Victoria Glendinning clearly illustrates in her biography of him. As a teenager he spent summer holidays on long bicycle tours all over the country. On one tour he and a friend bicycled all the way to the Shetlands off the North of Scotland (28). An early experience of being told to drown a litter of newborn puppies may have contributed to his later adult sensitivity and love of all living things, plants and animals included. When one of the puppies began “to fight desperately for its life, struggling, beating the water with its paws,” Leonard had the realization that this puppy was an individual “I,” acting just as he would if he were in the puppy’s place (29). He shared an enthusiasm for the great outdoors with his friend, Thoby Stephen, affectionately known as “The Goth.” They went walking and bird watching in the Cambridgeshire countryside. They once startled a flock of roosting starlings with a rocket just to watch them fly out of the hawthorn trees by the thousands (38).

Leonard's dislike and mistrust of civilization started very early in his life. In 1900, the then twenty-year-old Leonard wrote to his friend, Lytton Strachey, "I suddenly conceived an ardent desire to get away from civilization" (Glendinning 39). Glendinning says his desire to retreat from the world of competition and worldly ambition was recurrent. But he most poignantly came to nature in the jungles of South Asia. As a young man in his twenties, he was a civil servant stationed in Ceylon. Upon arrival Leonard describes the colonists there in a letter to Lytton Strachey: "The English are hell, the Australians Sodom & Gomorrah" (L. Woolf *Letters* 68). However, once outside in nature he felt differently: "I just see that it's heaven; I went for a bicycle ride this evening, & it was absolutely superb—the sunshine, the streets, the myriads, even the smells which too I just saw my degradation in loathing" (L. Woolf *Letters* 68). Although he experienced some depression and melancholia, his letters to Lytton tell of the solace he finds in the beauty of the outdoors. He writes, "I went for a walk the other night by the side of the lagoon at sunset; the beauty of it was supreme with the bright green of the paddy fields, the masses of palms, the sky every shade of red & yellow, & the sea every shade of blue" (L. Woolf *Letters* 72). Many of his letters home would feature this mix of beautiful landscapes with the veil of melancholy. He does not only expound on the beauty of the Ceylonese jungles, but also writes of the less attractive elements he found there. "The heat is quite inconceivable...the dry season has only just begun & there is no rain now until October. The grass has already turned brown, & all the weeds and leaves, except on the big trees, are drooping and dying down; there is a hot wind and clouds of dust" (L. Woolf *Letters* 82). Living so close to the land, in an "uncivilized" jungle, Leonard witnessed the circle of life that is nature.

Leonard gathered quite a menagerie while in Ceylon, and would also continue being surrounded by pets, both tame and wild, when he came back and married Virginia Stephen. To name a few “pets” in Ceylon: an owl, whom he admits almost starved to death, a horse, a deer, five dogs, a monkey, a mongoose, and a baby leopard that his bungalow roommate tamed (L. Woolf *Letters* 85; Glendinning 80). He said, “If you really understand an animal, so that he gets to trust you completely...there grows up between you affection of a purity and simplicity, which seems to me peculiarly satisfactory” (Glendinning 80). After he and Virginia married, their pets included many cats and dogs, and a much-loved marmoset named Mitz. An empty fish tank still sets on a tall table in Monk’s House. When I asked what it was used for, my guide, Vicky Funnell smiled and answered, “Leonard used it to rehabilitate sick fish from the pond” (Funnell).

Leonard was also an obsessive plantsman. His letters to friends and family are filled with extensive references to plants and gardening, as well as his love of animals. We know that he grew perennials, tropicals, trees, fruits, and vegetables from the meticulous records of the garden in his Garden Diary and Account books. The plant and nature societies that he belonged to were many: The Royal Horticultural Society, The National Cactus and Succulent Society, The British Pteridological Society, and The Sussex Beekeepers’ Association (L. Woolf *Letters* 463). He was also a member of The Zoological Society of London for many years (L. Woolf *Letters* 517).

Duncan Grant spent most of his childhood years in India, where his father, Major Bartle Grant, was stationed. He was the only child of the Major and Ethel née MacNeil, and a cousin of Lytton Strachey. His early childhood included visits to the family’s fir tree-lined country estate, The Doune, located in Rothiemurchus, Scotland. According to

Duncan's friend and British art historian, Richard Shone, these visits were an important ingredient in Duncan's visual memory and the loveliness of the country was very dear to him, as well as all of the Grant family (38-39). Perhaps this early involvement with the exotic environment of India, and the vacations in the Scottish countryside, are why Duncan is extremely tuned into the weather and the changing of the seasons in his letters.

These four friends would each continue a lifetime of engagement with nature. It also appears as a major ingredient in all of their creative endeavors. Leonard's intense passion for gardening and animals; Duncan and Vanessa's planning and creation of the Charleston gardens, and also their nature-filled creations on the canvas; and Virginia's engagement with nature in her writing and through her vigorous, daily walks on the downs and the transcription of this experience onto the page attest to the vital role it played in their daily lives as well as their imaginative lives. Her great-niece, Henrietta Garnett, said Virginia would walk daily regardless of weather conditions. "She walked in the cold, rain, and snow. She moved her body through the space that is nature," she told me one day during a visit to her London home in October 2013 (H. Garnett). Much has also been written on Virginia's forays out on the streets of London, which were also extensive, daily, and geared towards boosting creativity and organizing thoughts. Walking in nature was an impetus to her writing; it cleared her mind and allowed space for her stories to grow and evolve.

The Bloomsbury Group came out of the strict atmosphere of 19<sup>th</sup> century Victorian England. After Leslie's death the Stephen children made their first move away from their ancestors' and relatives' stifling way of living. The move from Kensington to Bloomsbury was monumental in their development. The new home had high front

windows to let in the afternoon sun, no more dark, heavy curtains and black walls like 22 Hyde Park Gate. The view from Virginia's window included plane trees in the square gardens, not the old neighbor, Mrs. Redgrave, washing her neck. Vanessa set out red rugs and Indian shawls, which she thought looked "rather fine and barbaric against our white walls" (Lee 204). They would live there, or nearby, until World War I. Then, they made their moves to the country. The move to the Sussex countryside was symbolic of freedom, much like that first move from conspicuously Victorian 22 Hyde Park Gate, to the artsy, slightly shabby Bloomsbury.

The move to the country, first to Wissett in Suffolk then shortly afterwards to Firle in Sussex, offered Duncan and his lover, David "Bunny" Garnett, an escape from the war. As conscientious objectors they had to help their country in other ways than active military duty. They chose farming; Vanessa and Clive leased Charleston Farmhouse so that they could all live together while the men worked on surrounding farms. Virginia and Leonard lived nearby, first at Asheham, then in Monk's House in Rodmel.

Perhaps this move to the country also signified a deeper motive; nature provided a relief from the demands of civilization. Vanessa especially expressed the desire to live simply and freely, without the stress imposed by the social customs and conventions of the day. Much has been written about their fascination with and views about what civilization was. At about this same time, Sigmund Freud was also working out his ideas about what the term really meant. A decade after Vanessa began her lease on Charleston, Freud would write, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929). In it he investigates the individual's place in civilization and the ever-present tension of the individual's need for

freedom with the conformity and repression that is required of civilized man. It was also Freud who wrote in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) that the main task of civilization is to defend people against nature. He also states that nature rises up against man in the form of deluges, storms, disease, and death to remind us there is no escape from it (nature), even this concept we call civilization (*Lapham's* 88). Two members of the Bloomsbury Group, James Strachey and his wife Alix, translated Freud's works into English, while Leonard and Virginia published them.

The gentle, rolling downs of the Sussex countryside provided the Bloomsberries with a peaceful atmosphere and more time for the imaginative life than they had in London. And of course, there is a practical reason why visual artists would want to create and be surrounded by nature's bounty in a garden: the constant inspiration it provides for the canvas. Although, it is interesting to note that they did keep homes in London as well. They would continue commuting back and forth until they left London permanently during World War II and resided afterward mainly in the country.



1. *South Downs, Lewes*



Photographs provide evidence of a certain carefree joyfulness at Monk's House and Charleston. Maggie Humm has done an excellent job of compiling the sisters' photographs into an impressive single book, *Snapshots of Bloomsbury*. In Virginia and Vanessa's photograph albums there are photos of friends and family talking and playing games on their lawns. There are many photographs of the children playing in the garden and posed beside flowerbeds and ponds. Not surprisingly pets, mostly dogs, show up in a lot of the photographs, too. Other outdoor locations are included: A picnic on the hills at High and Over; The Fry and Bell children at Studland Beach; Firle Park; Cassino, Italy; The Acropolis in Greece; Asheham; and even earlier photographs of the Stephen children at St. Ives. The majority of the photographs are of friends and family enjoying the company of each other in a beautiful outdoor setting.

As the photographs show, they also enjoyed the time spent vacationing in other countries. They were fascinated by and loved the more relaxed, or uncivilized, as Virginia described it in her diaries, atmosphere of the Mediterranean. She describes Greece favorably in her diary while visiting there with Roger Fry in 1932. She writes, "I had the vision, in Aegina, of an uncivilised, hot new season to be brought into our lives—how yearly we shall come here, with a tent, escaping England, & sloughing the respectable skin; and all the tightness & formality of London; & fame & wealth; & go back & become irresponsible" (Dunn 231).

Additionally, Leonard Woolf's time in Ceylon certainly played an important role in forming his views on nature. He wrote about his time there in his stories, memoirs, and works of non-fiction. Of this time he said, "I fell in love with the country, the people, and the way of life which were entirely different from everything in London and Cambridge

to which I had been born and bred” (L. Woolf *Letters* 95). Sounding a little bit like Virginia and her attraction to time, Leonard writes to Lytton, “I have no connection with yesterday... And I suppose I am happy too, happier I expect in terms of quantity than you” (L. Woolf *Letters* 95). He wrote that the jungle was a cruel and dangerous place. He encountered wild animals and wrote in his autobiography about getting lost in the jungle alone overnight, witnessing elephants fight, crocodiles choking on a tortoise, and “the uncanny homing instincts of jungle people and animals” (Glendinning 101). He had to shoot diseased cows and buffalos to keep the animals’ diseases from spreading (Glendinning 100). At one point, he comes face to face with a leopard and became so transfixed by its magnificence that he could not shoot it, as he was supposed to do to protect the village cattle from predators (Glendinning 100-101). He experienced wild nature firsthand, an opportunity not to be found in London.

As a witness to the circle of life, he came back to England with a very different opinion about who is civilized and who is barbaric. In his short story, “Pearls and Swine,” Leonard tells a thought-provoking tale contrasting the “barbaric” Indian natives and the “civilized” British colonists. He sets the scene with two men in a British smoking room discussing how Indian natives need to be taught, or civilized, by British example (266-267). One boasts that British colonists must “Spread the light” of Christianity and education to them because “They desire to follow. Surely, surely we should help guide their feet.... They respect us” (267). In the end it is the colonists who are shown by the natives’ example what true dignity and grace really are. The uncivilized natives prove to be more civilized than the “civilized” white men who are sent there to guide them and

spread the light to them. However, Woolf does not present the natives in a utopian light. They fight amongst themselves and there is even one murder mentioned.

The climax of the story presents another chance to consider who is the savage and who is the civilized man. White, a businessman of loose morals and shady business deals is suffering from extreme delirium tremens. Tethered to a post, for his safety as well as that of others, he begins to go mad. He is reacting with remorse to the life he lived and to fear. The Commissioner, who is the story's narrator, explains why, "Fear of punishment, of what was coming, of death, of the horrors, real horrors and the phantom horrors of madness" (277). The savages gather around to observe the spectacle. The tables have turned; the one who watched others work, becomes the watched. The pearl divers of all races and nationalities gather around him to observe as he writhes and screams. They look at him calmly and impassively. He pictures them all as devils of Hell sent to plague and torture him (278). They must wonder what all of his strange babblings mean since they have been forced by the civilized white man to believe that only their own religions are made up of superstitions and false beliefs. What must this talk of devils and phantoms say to the men? They do not judge. They move away quietly when asked to, only stopping to salaam, gesturing that they wish the suffering man peace. To return peace for revulsion certainly deserves the term Woolf chooses to describe their retreat—dignified. The savages are dignified and calm in contrast to White's descent into the throes of a harrowing death.

Simultaneously an Arab diver is reported to be dead. The Commissioner is asked permission to bring his lifeless body to shore. The extreme difference in the two deaths is very significant. The Arab diver dies peacefully, without suffering. His friends say of

him, “He had lived, had worked, and had died” (278). The Arab sheik’s elegy is spoken eloquently and he intones the word “Khallas,” meaning all is over; all is finished (278). This scene is the most solemn moment in the story. The natives view death as the natural procession of things, merely the last event in a life well lived, and part of the circle of life. White fought, thrashed, and spouted nonsensical gibberish until his last breath. He does not die a peaceful, civilized death like the Arab diver.

Virginia also experimented with the juxtaposition of man and nature in many of her novels and stories. Two short stories that I think especially reveal her views on nature are “Kew Gardens” and “In the Orchard.” In both stories, humans are not the center of the universal stage, but play only a small role. They are equally significant, or equally insignificant, as any of the other actors: trees, snails, leaves, and the breeze. Both stories show that nature is always in flux; it does not stop to consider man’s movements. Humans are of no concern to nature; man is only a diminutive presence in the cosmos. Virginia dissolves man’s innate tendency towards an anthropocentric worldview and puts him back into his proper place as just one of many species in the park or orchard.

In “Kew Gardens,” it is the snail in the flowerbed, not the people that the reader is to be concerned with. It is sliding along slowly, but purposefully, encountering insects and vegetation while it makes its way across crumbs of loose earth. In contrast, the humans are oblivious to it, the garden, and most importantly to each other. The people walk past the flowerbed and are “soon diminished in size among the trees and looked half transparent” (V. Woolf “Kew” 47-48). This sentence shows the indifference of nature towards man. To nature, man is no more significant than the lowly snail. However, it is in the last sentence that Virginia discloses the full meaning of this short story: “But there

was no silence, all the time the motor omnibuses were turning their wheels and changing their gear; like a vast nest of Chinese boxes all of wrought steel turning ceaselessly one within another the city murmured” (V. Woolf “Kew” 52). Each aspect of the story is metaphorically nested within a box, demonstrating the interconnectedness of everything in nature. The snail is constrained by the flowerbed, the flowerbed is constrained by Kew Gardens, and Kew Gardens is constrained by the city of London, and so on. Accordingly, the humans are constrained and will suffer the same inevitable fate as the snail; Woolf places them on an equal level when viewed through the indifferent lens of nature. Subsequently, the wheels and gears of progress will keep on turning and grinding. This theme of nature wild versus nature tame (constrained) comes up in many of the stories and paintings of Bloomsbury.

In “In the Orchard,” Virginia characteristically weaves a story of a lively human afternoon, an idyllic rural setting, and an oblivious woman’s solipsistic slumber into an examination of time, perspective, and interconnectedness. Each of the story’s three sections starts with the phrase “Miranda slept in the orchard.” Sounds coming from the nearby school and church represent the noise of quotidian life: the “shrill clamor” (V. Woolf “Orchard” 68) of the schoolchildren reciting lessons, the church organ playing hymns “Ancient and Modern” (V. Woolf “Orchard” 68), the church bells thudding to announce the churching of six poor women, the squeaking of the weathervane, and a sad, human, brutal, drunken cry.

While this human drama is being played out, nature is acting out her own performance. The sun illuminates all; the breeze blows gently at times and not so gently at other times, grasses nod, and a white butterfly floats just barely above Miranda’s

slumbering body. Nearby, the blackberries, apples and cabbages are ripening, fieldfares dart above swiftly, and leaves rustle in the wind. Then the winds change, perhaps symbolic of human progress or the futility of, and Miranda bolts upright and thoughtlessly declares, “Oh I shall be late for tea!” (V. Woolf “Orchard” 69). Time passes by and Miranda thinks only of tea, that most banal, British formality.

The reference to miles up in the air and miles beneath the earth (V. Woolf “Orchard” 70) seems to me to be an allusion to the vastness of nature and how the majority of it is out of our sphere of sight, perception, and certainly understanding. We do not, nor will we ever know all that occurs in the natural world, though we try, we try in vain. Nature remains the one thing that man cannot control or overpower.

Just as in “Kew Gardens,” enclosure is an important image in this story. Virginia writes, “The whole was compacted by the orchard walls” (V. Woolf “Orchard” 70). All of the components that make up nature, including man, are constrained and therefore interconnected within the walls imposed by nature. Man’s place in nature is represented by “a space as big as the eye of a needle” (V. Woolf “Orchard” 69). As far as nature is concerned, humans only occupy an infinitesimal space. Additionally, man is neither helpful nor essential for the rhythmic cycle of nature to continue. On the contrary, he may be harmful. Miranda, like the humans in “Kew Gardens,” remains unaware of the natural environment around her. The next to last sentence in the story describes Miranda as a mere purple streak, the color of her dress, in the orchard.

Woolf wraps up the story with this zen-like question: “Miranda slept in the orchard, or was she asleep or was she not asleep?” (V. Woolf “Orchard” 70). At this point, the reader realizes Miranda’s condition is irrelevant to this story and certainly

irrelevant to nature. Both of these stories are excellent examples of Virginia's use of abstraction, a technique also used by the Bloomsbury artists.

Encouraged by Roger Fry while creating art for the Omega Workshops in 1913, Vanessa turned away from the naturalistic style of painting and embraced the post-impressionistic style of abstraction. However, in 1917 she returned to her former naturalistic style and painted views of the garden and domestic still lifes. These paintings included elements of nature, such as flowers, vegetables, ponds, and trees. Years later her son, Quentin, asked her why she reverted from abstraction to her earlier style. She replied that she had come to the conclusion that nature was much richer and more interesting than anything one could invent (Spalding 163). This answer was reiterated by two of her grandchildren, Henrietta Garnett and Julian Bell (H. Garnett, J. Bell). Nature provided a plethora of scenes, and she and Duncan painted them. Very often friends and family would be a part of their paintings, surrounded by blowsy, wildly growing flowers along garden paths or garden statues depicting mythical characters. Most of these paintings were depictions involving normal daily activities, but sometimes sitters would be convinced to stay while the artists captured their likenesses on canvas as portraits. While far too numerous to name all, I would like to mention a few paintings that I think express the true essence of Vanessa and Duncan's views concerning nature:

*Lessons in the Orchard* c.1917 Duncan Grant. Two young boys, Julian and Quentin, sit at a wooden table in the middle of the orchard at Charleston. Their teacher is seated with them. Vanessa did not want to send the boys away to public schools for fear they would be pressured to conform (Spalding 162). At Charleston they would be educated and experience total freedom to experiment with any ideas they might have.

Additionally, they would be taught by many of Vanessa and Clive's friends, including David Garnett whom Quentin remembers teaching them about nature and helping them to become reasonably knowledgeable naturalists (Bell and Nicholson 128). In this painting the boys are surrounded by the lush greenery of the tree canopy above and verdant lawn under their feet. The tree to the left towers over them, providing shade while they work at their lessons.



2. Duncan Grant: *Lessons in the Orchard*, 1917

*View of the Pond at Charleston* c.1919 Vanessa Bell. This is a view from the top-floor studio window. Nature wild is shown in the fields beyond the pond and trees, out past the fenced-in tame area near the house. On the windowsill sets a still life including a ceramic vase, ready to contain flowers from the garden. Views from windows and doors



were a theme in Vanessa's paintings. She seems to have spent quite some time thinking about the relationship between interior and exterior spaces.

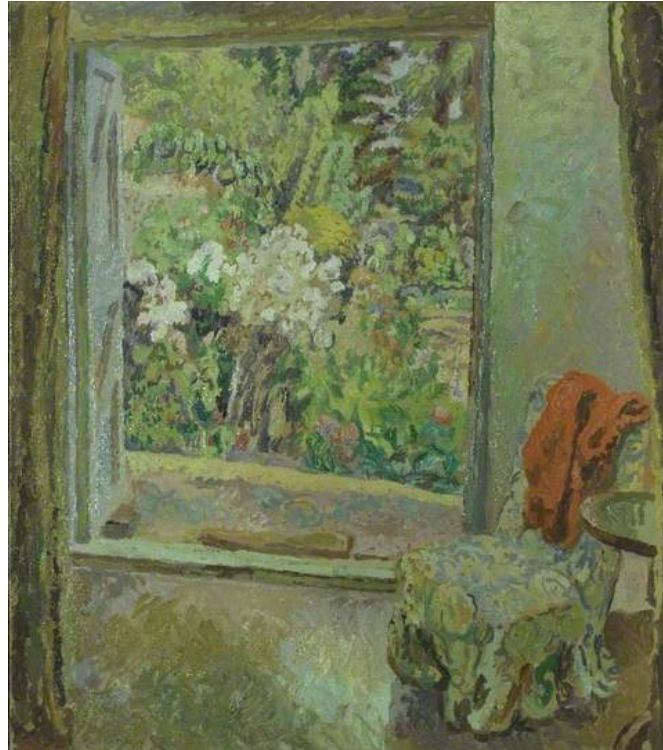


3. Vanessa Bell: *View of the Pond at Charleston*, 1919

*The Open Door* c.1926 Bell ; *The Doorway* c.1929 Grant; *Door to the Garden* c.1945 Grant. All three paintings illustrate the contrast of nature tame versus nature wild, all shown through the Charleston studio door. The threshold delineates this boundary between interior and exterior worlds. Once you step out into the lushness and blithe atmosphere of the garden, a freedom of body and mind is apt to take place. Nature allows for freedom from censoring, confining, asphyxiating civilization. This is the spirit of Bloomsbury's relationship to nature.



4. *Vanessa Bell: The Open Door, 1926*



5. *Duncan Grant: The Doorway, 1929*

*Angelica Seated at the Charleston Studio Door*, is a painting of Vanessa and Duncan's daughter with the colorful floriferous garden in the background. She sits reading a book, oblivious to the world around her, and the garden goes on regardless of the little girl reading a book. They are connected but not dependent on one another in this scene. They are both simply being held in this space.

*A Conversation* c.1913-1916 Bell. Although not a painting from Charleston's garden, I believe this is an important testament to the significance of nature in Vanessa's paintings. Currently on view at The Courtauld Gallery, it shows a glimpse of a bright garden scene in the background between three whispering women. At first glance, a viewer may not notice the brilliant carpet of flowers. But a closer look reveals a dazzling array that appears to be right outside the window, very close by, almost as a witness to the three women's private conversation. I do not believe this to be coincidental, but a purposeful portrayal of the important involvement of nature in the human life.



6. Vanessa Bell: *A Conversation*, 1913-16

The letters between Vanessa and Duncan reveal a positive, enthusiastic view of nature through their shared garden at Charleston. In almost every letter, especially those from Duncan to Vanessa, we find an account of the day's weather, what is happening in the garden, what he is anticipating happening, which trees are about to bloom, the seeds arriving, ordering the lily bulbs to plant, and various other gardening activities. Vanessa also writes liberally about the same subjects, however she is more inclined to include people's activities in her reports, especially what the children are doing in the garden, orchard, and pond. There is almost always mention made of animals, both domestic and wild.

Vanessa was completely competent at running a house in the country. She employed domestic help and the children had governesses, but the day-to-day upkeep and caretaking decisions were mostly her responsibility. She was aware that life in the country is not as easy as one might think and certainly has its moments of intense labor. She writes to Roger, "The fact is one hasn't had a moment to oneself during domestic life in the country. Nature is too much for me altogether, either in the shape of weeds or children, and fills up all one's spare time" (V. Bell *Selected Letters* 285). According to Bloomsbury scholar, Frances Spalding, life at the beginning of 1918 was harsh and rigorous at Charleston and coal was hard to come by. Vanessa, ever the caretaker, started a rabbit-breeding program to supplement meager food rations (V. Bell *Selected Letters* 174). Contradictorily, much earlier in her life she would lament the fact that Clive shot and killed three of these "poor little furry beasts." She further explains, "It surpasses my imagination entirely, this wish to kill—does it yours...I don't understand why anyone gets

any pleasure from killing them” (V. Bell *Selected Letters* 69). Living close to nature creates many of these paradoxes.

When she looked back on the difficult early days at Charleston during the war, she ponders how they found time to paint and experiment with color schemes. She writes in a letter to Duncan, “Considering what a struggle it was to exist here at all, I can’t think how we had so much surplus energy” (V. Bell *Selected Letters* 253). She also admits that during the war and in times of starvation, “I’m sure one’s much better off in the country. We are going to keep all the ducks and hens we can and rabbits, besides growing potatoes, etc...” (V. Bell *Selected Letters* 211). Vanessa knew that her family’s survival did not depend solely on her functional interaction with nature. Clive Bell was a wealthy man and brought treats with him from London when he returned to Charleston. Yet, she still tended vegetables and fruit and made use of the garden’s resources.

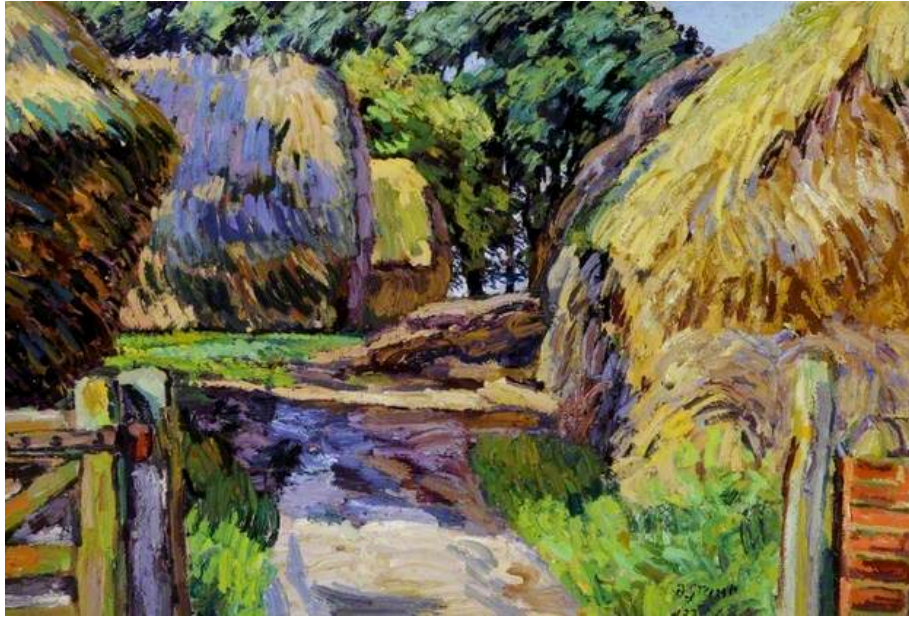
Vanessa’s free-spirited, yet rational, attitude allowed her to look upon nature as a neutral force, not one to be either feared or trusted. Just as her father had, she raised her children to be immersed in nature in a practical way. In a letter written to Roger Fry in 1916, she says, “Of course the children need practically no attention here beyond getting up and putting to bed and feeding as they are turned out into the garden and fields all day by themselves” (REF 1/159/4/8 CHA, King’s College Archives).

Vanessa interacted with nature differently from Virginia. In her autobiography, *Deceived With Kindness*, Vanessa’s daughter, Angelica Garnett, wrote, “Vanessa never went for a walk. If she went out, it was either to shop in Lewes or to find a less familiar landscape for painting” (96). Her relationship with nature was one of serious study, partly required by her profession as an artist. She studied the garden and the way the light fell

on certain areas of the garden. Her granddaughter, Henrietta Garnett, says she studied each little part of a flower up close, looking at the intricate lines and details. I asked her if Vanessa stayed out in all kinds of weather like her sister, Virginia. She answered, “Because of the nature of her work, she couldn’t stay out and paint in all kinds of weather. But she had her studio” (H. Garnett). Of course, she could stay inside and take in the magnificent views of the Sussex countryside from her studio windows, and she did. In 1941, she painted the view across the field from Charleston to Tilton House, Maynard and Lydia Keynes’s home.

Vanessa loved the garden at Charleston and neither she nor Duncan tired of painting it. She did occasionally venture out on the downs to paint. Angelica explains, “She loved the pearly luminosity of the Sussex light, the pale gold of the stubble fields, the orange-roofed barns which stood in mysterious isolation, and the silver willows whose cool grey smudges relieved the dark august green of ash or elm. Usually, however, she had no need to go further than the garden to find the perfect motif.... Her hesitant, tentative movements recalled those of a sleepwalker or a snail, leaving in its wake a trail of silver” (A. Garnett 96). Richard Shone writes in *Charleston: Past and Present* that in his earlier years, Duncan ventured out to the countryside to paint the country scenes of farms, barns, and ponds. Duncan, Shone says, “was happy to venture with his easel into cowsheds and rickyards and the countryside beyond” (Q. Bell *Charleston* 28).





7. Duncan Grant: *Haystacks*, 1933

Many of Britain's 20<sup>th</sup> century artists and writers made a move from London to the country: Rupert Brooke, Dora Carrington, Edward Carpenter, and Augustus John, to name a few. The reasons for their move vary, some may have had a similar desire to be away from the city to make gardens, paint and write, and commune quietly with friends. Others seemed to be rebelling against remnants of Victorianism and still others seemed to just be rebelling. I suggest that the Bloomsberries were more interested in making their own way, not making a statement. What started out as a youthful rebellion from severe Victorian principles, turned into a mature experiment in living a life that is truly satisfying and beauty-filled.

Virginia spent some time with the poet Rupert Brooke and even wrote of an evening that included skinny-dipping. Rupert and the Neo-Pagans, the moniker given to them by Virginia, were seeking the simple life. Perhaps, they can be seen as the precursor to the hippies of the 1960's. According to Hermione Lee, they went on huge walks with knapsacks, liked to take their clothes off and swim naked...ate vegetables, believed in

socialism, wore socks and sandals and head-scarves and open-necked shirts” (Lee 293-295). Virginia wrote about Rupert in 1918, “His feet were permanently bare...he lived all day, and perhaps slept all night, in the open air” (Lee 293). Although Virginia was exposed to this extreme form of naturalistic living, she did not embrace it. Lee conjectures that the Neo-Pagans seemed to provide a contrast with her own more skeptical, intellectual group (294). This says to me that Virginia and the Bloomsberries were not looking to make a friend of nature or to “become one with nature;” theirs was a more respectful, intellectual, and rational approach. And although Charleston Farmhouse was clothing optional at times, that was more of a life choice than a lifestyle.

Virginia admired Vanessa’s ease and lack of self-consciousness in the country. She explains in a letter to her friend, Violet Dickinson, “Nessa seems to have slipped civilization off her back, and splashes about entirely nude, without shame, and enormous spirit. Indeed, Clive now takes up the line that she has ceased to be a presentable lady—I think it all works admirably” (V. Woolf *Letters* 21). Various photographs, drawings, and paintings attest to this lax attitude towards clothing. They were comfortable with themselves in nature.

This natural ease was not in the same vein as the gypsy life of fellow artist Augustus John. In an interview with Vanessa’s grandson Julian Bell (J. Bell), he points out that Vanessa and her friends were not the “wild bohemian free-lovers” as they are said to be, and at times they were actually “somewhat repressed.” He gave the example of how Vanessa handled the truth of Angelica’s parentage by suppressing it until Angelica was eighteen.



The Bloomsbury Group had other encounters with these fellow artists. Roger brought the writer and poet Edward Carpenter for a visit with Vanessa and Duncan while they were letting a house in Guilford during the hot summer of 1911. During a nighttime expedition Roger, Duncan, and Edward bathed naked in the river (V. Bell *Sketches* 146). While these accounts of skinny-dipping may seem irrelevant to this paper, I propose that they actually illustrate a natural ease with the human body, free of the encumbrance of severe Victorian social mores.

Lytton Strachey who appears to be the least earthy of the Bloomsberries shared a home, Tidmarsh Mill, in the Berkshire countryside with Dora Carrington. Their home included an interesting and beautiful garden that Carrington tended. In her biography, *The Art of Dora Carrington*, Jane Hill describes the impressive natural setting that Carrington created and maintained at Tidmarsh Mill. She kept many creatures: cats, honey bees, cockerels for eating, hens that provided eggs daily, a doe rabbit, ducks, and ewe lambs destined for the market place (57). She maintained orchards, a vegetable patch, and flower gardens. An onsite ‘greenery house’ was used for overwintering and cultivating plants. It is obvious that she lived close to the rhythms of the natural world. Carrington was likely a great influence on Lytton, who appreciated the natural world, but did not join in her enthusiasm for actually tending the earth. Writing in a letter to Carrington, Lytton has this to say about being in nature, “It strikes me as maniacal to live anywhere but among trees and grasses, open skies, fresh butter, wood fires and days that are endless and empty” (47). Hill writes that Carrington was always out in her garden. Regardless of the weather she could be found out in the garden beekeeping, feeding the pigeons, or planting, her face tanned and her hair bleached from the many hours spent outdoors (99).

It was all about being surrounded by beautiful scenery in the company of your friends. The two most important goals in life, as believed by philosopher and Cambridge don, G.E. Moore, are having aesthetic experiences and personal relationships.



8. Dora Carrington: *Tidmarsh Mill*, 1918

In his book, *Eminent Victorians*, Lytton satirized the hypocrisy of four of Victorian England's great moral leaders. Using playful irreverence he poked fun at General Gordon and his search for the literal location of the Garden of Eden. Ironically, Carrington painted life-size murals of Adam and Eve on Lytton's bedroom walls. And this is an important point for consideration: Although they are known as irreligious or atheistic, it is evident from their painting and writing that all the members of the Bloomsbury Group were very acquainted with the stories and proverbs of the Bible. They painted various scenes from the Bible and included biblical references in their writing. Henrietta Garnett explained it to me in this way. She said, "They knew the Bible. Everyone should read the Bible, but not be forced to. You have to read it to understand other stuff, such as Eliot" (H. Garnett).

The Bloomsberries studied world myths and reinterpreted many of the stories in their work, understanding that myth is the way that humans have understood nature and the surrounding environment for centuries. Duncan and Vanessa reinvented mythological scenes for their paintings. Some of their favorite subjects to depict, often in a satirical light, were: Adam and Eve, Daphne and Apollo, Venus and Adonis, and The Madonna and Child. At St. Michael and All Angels Church, commonly known as Berwick Church, in nearby Berwick, they painted key scenes from the New Testament as magnificent wall murals. Duncan also painted the four seasons on the chancel screen. It is relevant to this paper, that Duncan would be the one to paint *Four Seasons*. In his aforementioned letters to Vanessa, he truly does speak in detail of the changing of the seasons, specific flowers coming in to bloom, and various vegetables maturing in the veggie patch. He notices the world around him in such detail. His astute observation of the natural world is, within the group, rivaled only by Virginia. In a letter to Vanessa dated September 1920<sup>1</sup>, Duncan describes a walk through the autumnal woods:

The weather is very nice... Yesterday I went for a long walk after that knowing dinner would be late—through Beanstalk Lane and up through the Beech Woods to the top of the downs. I had not realized how lovely the woods are now—just before they really turn gorgeous & are all sorts of glittering various browns & greens. I send you a sample of Nature's marbling which I picked up in the woods (REF 8010.5.1210 Tate Britain Archives).

This group of friends was intelligent and rational enough to know that Earth would never transform into a future Arcadia, Utopia, Paradise, or Eden. They also knew enough about humankind's psychological structure to know that once technology took

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<sup>1</sup> This letter is only dated Thursday with an assumed date of September 1920 (per the archivist at Tate Britain Archives).

hold there would be no stopping progress, even if it led to destruction of nature and the demise of civilization.

Although they didn't expect a utopian earth, it was nevertheless worrisome and disconcerting to see what was happening to the countryside and environment. It is Leonard who has the most to say outright about litter, pollution, and industrialization, especially in his later years. In his 1966 autobiography, *Downhill All the Way*, he wrote, "I suppose that the nineteenth-century scientific revolution—in particular electricity and the internal combustion engine—have changed the world—one will probably soon have to say the universe—much more profoundly than anything else which has happened" (177-178). He also bemoans London's car-infested streets and includes them in a list of the evil and misery that scientific inventions have contributed to: The destruction of Hiroshima and two world wars (178). This proves he is well aware of the environmental dangers of automobile emissions. And yet, he always owned automobiles. There is a whole page of, plus more individual, photographs devoted to his new Lanchester car (Humm 30) and several diary entries with their automobiles as the main subject. He did not eschew technology, even though he was well aware of the negative consequences.

Leonard contrasts visiting Cassis in 1914 and then again in 1940. In 1914 it was silent, only filled with bird song and no voice of the motorcar was heard. The scene twenty-six years later is completely different: "A stream of perpetual motion, of moving cars nose to tail and tail to nose... unending sea of villas... One's ears were deafened by the voice of the loudspeaker and innumerable transistors [sic ?]. The rocks were littered with bottles and paper bags" (179-180). He sadly admits that this scene is the norm almost everywhere now.

Leonard was also astutely attuned to the weather; perhaps this arose out of the necessity of tending a garden. He makes some interesting, and surprising statements in a letter to Vanessa dated 13 February 1928. He writes, “The weather here is completely out of hand. It rarely stops raining and hurricane succeeds hurricane...According to Roger it could easily be cured by melting a small icecap in Greenland which would not really be difficult. It was melted in 700 A.D. for a short time when Europe had perfect weather” (L. Woolf *Letters* 231-232). In 1928, Roger, a Cambridge trained scientist, was talking about the connection of weather patterns and melting icecaps. I suspect that the Bloomsberries were discussing climate change and its effects long before the general population even knew it was happening.

Additionally, their friend, Maynard Keynes, wrote of the need for population control, a subject that still stirs fervent controversial debate today. “The time has already come,” he wrote in *The End of Laissez-Faire: The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, “when each country needs a considered national policy about what size of population, whether larger or smaller than at present or the same, is most expedient” (42). He is of course speaking from an economist’s point of view, but is it too far of a stretch to speculate that Maynard may have also had the depletion of world resources on his mind? I think certainly not. The population grows larger every year as humans quickly exhaust the Earth’s natural resources and dramatically upset the capacity of the ecosystem. As Leonard pointed out this has occurred mostly since the Industrial Revolution and also the increase in population. Quentin Bell writes in his biography of Virginia, that she felt the countryside near Rodmel was being spoilt by development. Dog-racing tracks and other incongruities were being built in the valley and ugly bungalows were forming a “kind of

holiday slum” along the seacoast (Q. Bell *Virginia Woolf* 169). But most heartbreaking of all was the transformation of Asheham by a cement plant. From then on Virginia’s lovely view of the South Downs was cluttered with tractors, lorries, excavators, and scaffolding. Vast corrugated iron sheds went up on the property, toxic white dust coated the valley, and the air was filled with nauseating fumes. Trees and vegetation died and “the hill itself was hollowed out as though it had been a diseased tooth” (Q. Bell *Virginia Woolf* 169). Leonard laments in a letter to G.E. Moore that Asheham “is now an immense cement works which you can see from our garden” (L. Woolf *Letters* 246). They watched its regression from a beautifully fecund landscape to a polluted, ash-covered, and barren terrain. Both he and Virginia were extremely affected and saddened by its total annihilation. Virginia was infuriated and often discussed it with her friends. The beautiful country where she walked every afternoon was ruined. She despised what humans were doing to the land.



9. Roger Fry: *Lewes (Betchworth Limeworks)*, 1907



10. Coal pulverizing plant and raw material dryers beside Asheham House, 1928

Virginia's stories present a natural world that is not in need of human control or guidance. Things happen because that is the usual order of nature: Snakes swallow toads, snails crawl along oblivious to people, people crawl along oblivious to snails, it thunders during pageants and plays, rain pours down, rivers freeze, and most significantly, mothers, brothers, and sisters die before their time. Virginia's writings are full of the ordinariness of daily life and she always includes details of nature to create an atmosphere, yet she avoids the common tendency to declare some aspects of nature as good, and others as evil. She avoids this, thereby creating a non-dualistic reality of nature and the natural world.

These friends had a unique connection with nature not easily defined in concrete terms. Although I have attempted to give an idea of this sometimes-contradictory relationship, I think Hermione Lee best describes and sums up their feelings succinctly when writing about Virginia. Describing Virginia's diary entries, Lee explains that Virginia's "country notes are unflinching, not idyllic—a chicken is found with its head wrung off, a hawk has dropped a dead pigeon, butterflies feed on dung" (379). Virginia used her Diary for what she called "seeing life" (Lee 380). From an entry dated 8 Sept 1918:

I remember lying on the side of a hollow, waiting for L. to come & mushrooms, & seeing a red hare loping up the side & thinking suddenly, 'This is Earth life.' I seemed to see how earthy it all was, & I myself an evolved kind of hare; as if a moon-visitor saw me (379).

Virginia truly "saw life" and viewed it through the lens of the natural world.

## CHAPTER 3

### Fear in the Garden: Pan, Poppies, and Puritanism in Victorian Gardens

Virginia's experience of nature and "seeing life" is similar to the rest of the Bloomsbury Group's experience. They were all brought up in the same era and had comparable familial situations. Their parents were products of the early Victorian era in British history and, therefore, the Bloomsberries received a common inheritance of cultural mores and societal expectations. One of these inherited behaviors was the irrational Victorian fear of nature. This fear of nature informed Victorian society's perception of the natural world.

Many factors possibly contributed to this irrational fear of nature: the earlier necessity of being cautious outside of the city and in the wilder locales of the forests and countryside, the real threat of destruction caused by storms and ominous weather, and myths and fairytales that exaggerate the danger that lurks in the woods. The fear of nature evolved over centuries. Some of the irrational thinking about nature came from Christianity, the most prevalent religion in England at this time. Christian life is future-focused; the Christian is more concerned with the world to come, Heaven, than the world that is here and now, Earth. In *Landscape Into Art*, the art historian and Bloomsbury acquaintance, Kenneth Clark states that medieval Christian philosophy impacted man's views on nature and art. He writes, "If our earthly life is no more than a brief and squalid interlude, then the surroundings in which it is lived need not absorb our attention. If ideas are Godlike and sensations debased, then our rendering of our appearances must as far as possible be symbolic, *and nature, which we perceive through our senses, becomes*



*positively sinful* (emphasis mine)” (3). Writing in the Middle Ages, the Christian saint, Anselm, declared that the more bodily senses that are aroused, the more dangerous the situation. Therefore, a garden, which delights all five senses—sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste, would rank among the highest of dangerous locations (3). Beauty and fragrance, which could induce euphoria in people causing them to lose control, are not to be enjoyed on this earth, but saved for the Promised Land—Heaven, Paradise, the New Eden. Here on earth, man is to labor in vain and work against nature as punishment for breaking God’s cardinal rule in Eden, as it is recorded in The Bible: Thou shalt not eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (*RSV Bible*, Gen. 3:17-19).

Not only did this supreme injunction lead to Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the doctrine of original sin, but also created an unjust dynamic between the male and female sexes that lasts even now. Another outcome of this act of disobedience was the belief that women and nature are to be feared, not trusted, and therefore controlled by the much more discerning and moderate man. The idea that the pursuit of knowledge would be met with divine anger, banishment, and eternal punishment was not accepted by the intellectual, curious, and erudite Bloomsbury Group.

They would use their art and writing to try and dismantle these irrational beliefs that lead to dangerous philosophical –isms, for example, classism, sexism, and racism.



11. Vanessa Bell: *The Expulsion from the Garden, after Masaccio, 1952*



12. Roger Fry: *Adam and Eve, c.1890s*

Another problematic of their time, and presently still, is anthropocentrism. Conversely, the Bloomsbury Group held a biocentric view of nature, which allows for all forms of life to be considered as having intrinsic value equally. Biocentrism is in direct opposition to anthropocentrism, which states that human beings are the most significant entity of the universe. Anthropocentrism brings forth the idea that nature is subservient to man, and as such can be used however is required for man's own avaricious gain, regardless of the harm that is incurred to nature.

According to ecologist Jim Nollman, anthropocentrism resulted from man's misconceived ideas about the relationship between humanity and nature. Religion plays a part in this misunderstanding. In *Why We Garden: Cultivating a Sense of Place*, he writes, "Until the middle of the nineteenth century, most Utopian visions paid special attention both to the soil and to an enlightened sense of place" (50). He states that although the idea of Utopia varied, whether an Italian Renaissance ideal city or Thomas More's Amaurote, at this time, all ideas stressed the importance of working closely with the rhythms of nature (50). He further claims that the mass exodus from the countryside to the cities provoked by the Industrial Revolution, created a schism between man and nature and set up a novel kind of parallel existence—using nature to fuel the progress of man. Many innovators of the time, including William Morris, had their own ideas about art and life that were based on the desire for a pre-industrial Utopia (51). As man's attitude towards nature changes, so does his image of Utopia. Views on nature have wavered back and forth over the centuries, from a strict biblical view of nature as an enemy to be conquered, to what we have now, nature as our own personal machine to control, exploit, and perhaps, ultimately destroy.

It seems reasonable that the Bloomsbury Group did not share this prevalent Victorian fear of nature because they were raised in intellectual families that held progressive views on science. Even Roger, whose family was indubitably practicing Quakers, was raised with the knowledge of science, including botany and family scientific experiments. He studied science at Cambridge and had a successful academic career. There he would reject the religion of his youth. The Bloomsberries were also influenced by the philosophical teaching of G.E. Moore, Cambridge academic and

Apostle, and his landmark book, *Principia Ethica*. Leslie Stephen was an Anglican clergyman who renounced his religious beliefs and resigned from Cambridge after losing his faith in God. I propose that once the Bloomsberries were free of any religious restraint, they were able to think for themselves and question everything. Unquestionable faith, conformity, and obedience are high tenets of most religions. If adherents are disobedient or seen as sinful, they will be banished from the church social circle (paradisiacal Eden) as a form of punishment like that experienced by Adam and Eve.

As senior member of the group, Roger Fry held a special place. He was loved and respected by all, and it was Roger's innovative ideas that often lit the creative spark that allowed the artists and writers to pursue their work with success. Although Roger did not agree with the majority of his parents' values, he shared two passions with them throughout his life: political common ground in Quaker pacifism and a love of nature (Shone 38). Virginia Woolf begins her biography, *Roger Fry*, with Roger's earliest childhood memories. She quotes his description of his childhood garden as being "still for me [Roger] the imagined background for almost any garden scene that I read of in books" (15). As evidence of his strict Quaker upbringing replete with moral admonitions of obedience and humility, he says of the garden, "The serpent still bends down to Eve from the fork of a peculiarly withered and soot begrimed old apple tree which stuck out of the lawn. And various other scenes of seduction seem to me to have taken place within its modest suburban precincts. But it was also the scene of two great emotional experiences, my first passion and my first great disillusion" (15). The object of Roger's first passion was a red oriental poppy that was in the square yard of bed that had been allotted to him as his own private garden (15). He recalled, "The poppies were always

better than my wildest dreams. Their red was always redder than anything I could imagine....” (15). He admits to being able to worship the poppy more sincerely than he ever could a “gentle Jesus” and that he felt more affection for this red poppy than almost anyone else, except his father (15). He endured ridicule by his family for the strong attachment and adoration bestowed upon his plant. That was the emotional experience of his first passion. The first great disillusion that he experienced was one that I believe to be even more emotionally marked in his memories and one that would shape his future beliefs. He writes:

It was again a summer morning and I was leaning against my mother’s knee as she sat on a low wicker chair and instructed me in the rudiments of botany. In order to illustrate some point she told me to fetch her one of the buds of my *adored* poppy plant or at least that was what I understood her to say. I had already been drilled to implicit obedience and though it seemed to me an almost sacrilegious act I accomplished it (16).

Virginia goes on to tell the rest of the story, since Roger does not finish it. According to her, he picked the poppy as ordered and was then reprimanded for doing so. This was a confusing experience for Roger and one that still astonished him fifty years later (16).

It is easy to surmise that this request was not just about the poppy. This was not only a botany lesson, but also a test of a young boy’s obedience and certainly it is not difficult to conjecture that this was also a lesson in the dangerous pursuit of passion or putting nature above the maker. Regardless of the reason for Mrs. Fry’s request, she tried to squelch Roger’s passionate attachment to beauty; she literally nipped it in the bud early on. Although her efforts would prove to be futile.

Roger's appreciation of beauty would later lead him to abandon the scientific path he began at Cambridge once he discovered his true calling and passion to be art. Of particular interest to him was Oriental, non-western, and primitive art. What precisely did Roger mean by the term primitivism? When writing about the Bushmen it is apparent that he means a society that is less sophisticated or uncivilized by Western standards. However, primitive does not equal inferior. In his essay, "The Art of the Bushmen," found in his collected essays, *Vision and Design*, Roger writes that the art of the Bushman is more naturalistic than conceptual due to the perfectly adapted connection they had with their environment (67). He explains, "The very perfection of vision, and presumably of the other senses with which the Bushmen and Paleolithic man were endowed, fitted them so perfectly to their surroundings that there was no necessity to develop the mechanical arts beyond the elementary instruments of the chase" (67). Bushmen art is more visual and perceptual and less conceptual; therefore, it is more like post-impressionism in its presentation. The difference lies in what Roger called the two lives that we live: the imaginative and the biological (or instinctual). In the Introduction to *Vision and Design*, J. B. Bullen writes that it is important to grasp Roger's idea of the two lives if "we are to understand why Fry felt that some types of art are superior to others" (xv). The biological life is filled with practicalities: being, doing, and striving. It is overly concerned with right and wrong and the morality of our nature. It views the external world in an analytical, utilitarian, and



13. Roger Fry: *Poppies*, 1917

conceptual way. The imaginative life is contemplative, less concerned with moral issues, and views the physical world in an intuitive, creative, and synthesizing manner (xiv).

Perhaps this interest in the primitive lifestyle, one of simple beauty, nature, and importance placed on creating art, is what led to Roger's idea of the imaginative life. He believed that all people, from primitive to modern man, could appreciate art. Thus, formal education is not a prerequisite for the appreciation, or even the creation, of works of art (Bloomsbury class notes June 5 2013). Certainly he shared this concept with his Bloomsbury friends and it impacted their experience of getting away from civilization, London, to create art and enjoy the beauty of the countryside.

Roger argued in "An Essay in Aesthetics," "Nature is heartlessly indifferent to the needs of the imaginative life" (25). Yet, he would also declare, "There is beauty in Nature" (26). Nature is a source of inspiration in art, but it is not to be imitated. Perhaps the Bloomsberries' intimate connection to nature is also an indirect consequence of Roger's idea that "It is only when an object exists in our lives for no other purpose than to be seen that we really look at it...." (Fry "Essay" 18).

It may seem overly simplistic to assert that nature's *only* role is to evoke emotion, or correspond to beauty, and I do not think that is what Roger means here. However, it does seem to be an important idea of the Bloomsbury Group's view of nature. Their imaginative life, i.e. art and literature, was inspired by nature, yet they also cared deeply for the natural world as evidenced by their work.

Roger also wrote about man's complex relationship with nature in the biological sense. Craufurd Goodwin cites Roger's 1928 article, "The Garden of Eden" in an article for the *Journal of the History of Economic Thought*. Roger deplored the fact that the

enjoyment of British gardens was viewed as suspicious and possibly even sinful, according to Victorian standards of morality. He speculated that the late night social festivities that took place in German gardens might cause the British authorities to “hurriedly spend large sums of money on iron railings” (Goodwin 418). One can assume that this tangible enclosure would serve to control the people and also be a psychological mechanism to persuade them that wild nature, i.e. socializing and courtship, is dangerous and must be properly managed. The Bloomsberries knew that fear was used as an effective way to control society, and what better way to provoke fear than to create borders and fences designed to keep out anything undesirable? Control and order are of utmost importance in park and garden design if you wish to appear proper and civilized. And of course, England in the late 1800’s was trying very hard to remain proper and civilized. However, English garden design was changing at this time and the new gardening philosophy was more inclined to agree with that of the Bloomsbury Group. Pleasure, not fear, was the design goal and an integral pathway to pleasure included beautiful spaces to connect with friends.

The evolution of Victorian gardening styles is one symbolic measurement of how society was changing at this time. Monochromatic bedding plants packed within formal structured garden beds and enclosed by tightly-clipped evergreen shrubs, were the norm until Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson turned English garden design completely around by promoting wild and natural gardens. Gardens became less formal, more colorful, and plants were allowed to mingle freely with their neighbors. Louise Wickham, garden historian and author of *Gardens in History: A Political Perspective*, explains the traditional use of Victorian gardens and public parks. She writes that initially public parks



were planned to provide common man with a space to walk in. This would improve his moral fiber and encourage good behavior, thereby promoting civilization (6). The idea of controlling man's behavior by placing him in a controlled environment is thought provoking. If public parks were meant to promote a civilized society, then it stands to reason that the natural garden might promote the opposite: a rebellious society. As society changed, people became more in control of their own lives and futures and women began inching towards equality. Society became less tame, more wild and consequently so did gardens.

The interior, domestic life had always been the Victorian woman's domain. However, Vanessa expanded her domain to include all of Charleston—the exterior, as well as the interior of the home. With Vanessa as the center, Charleston was a cohesive environment consisting of nature, both wild and tame. Gardens at Charleston and Monk's house come right up to the windows. When I visited in October 2013, I was struck by the magnificent views out of nearly every door and window looking out into floriferous, lush, gardens and the world of nature beyond. The story of Charleston's restoration is told in Anthea Arnold's book, *Charleston Saved 1979-1989*. The architect and garden historian who was in charge of the garden restoration, Peter Shepheard, states, "The design of the garden was simple, even a little stiff, between its flint walls; a pattern of straight paths and rectangular beds studded with ancient apple trees, all slightly overlaid with a teeming mass of flowers. It was an apotheosis of the traditional English cottage garden" (86). Roger helped Vanessa and Duncan design the garden and they had a gardener to help with the maintenance. However, they did work in their garden often and were the primary caretakers.

Writing in 1898, Elizabeth von Arnim details the plight of Victorian women interested in gardening. In her book, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, she laments that she, a proper lady, could not plant her garden herself. So, she sneaked out during the servants' dinner hour and "feverishly" prepared the ground with spade and rake and plants ipomoea seeds. Afterwards, she runs back into her home and pretends to have been reading all the while in order to save her reputation. Although, she considers gardening to be a "blessed sort of work" (26), and sounding a bit like a precursor to the Bloomsbury Group adds, "And if Eve had had a spade in Paradise and known what to do with it, we should not have had all that sad business of the apple" (25-26). An interesting aside: Morgan Forster became the tutor of Countess Von Arnim's children.

Prominent garden designer Gertrude Jekyll was a major influence on the changes occurring in English gardening style. As an artist, she had a keen eye for color in the garden and declared in her esteemed book, *Wood and Garden*, that the main purpose of a garden "is to give its owner the best and highest kind of earthly pleasure" (365). Accordingly, when Roger designed the gardens at Durbins, his home in Guilford, he consulted Jekyll. The garden was terraced and included several pools. According to Fry scholar, Christopher Reed, the most striking aspect of Fry's design—and the feature most evocative of Bloomsbury's later domestic aesthetic—is the interpenetration of inside and outside in this central social space. Reed writes in *Bloomsbury Rooms* that all of the windows below the attic are oversized, allowing vistas out into the garden. Vanessa remembers the house "faced South and seems to me in memory to have been nearly always filled with blazing sunshine" with a view that stretched as far as the Wey river (42). Durbins was certainly planned with the intention of looking out into the natural

world, enjoying the view, and capturing it on canvas for future generations to enjoy. Not only did Roger include beautiful views and landscaping in his garden, but he also planted many flowers, trees, “strawberries, gooseberries, and currants; on the lowest levels were a tennis court and vegetable garden” (43). It also seems to me that Roger’s purposeful placement of garden elements in relation to the house and property, meant he may have been an early practitioner of permaculture, or at least employed some of the principles used in that system. Like his ideological roots in the arts and crafts movement, permaculture utilizes gardens and houses as indices of health and happiness of the residents (42).



14. Roger Fry: *The Artist's Garden at Durbins*, 1915

Roger’s friend and fellow Bloomsberry, E.M. Forster, Morgan to his friends, was also influenced by nature from his childhood. Morgan’s biographer, Margaret Ashby, wrote in *Forster Country* that Morgan’s mother, Lily Forster, was an enthusiastic gardener and shortly after moving into their country home, Rooks Nest, transformed the

land into extensive garden beds. Roses were her favorites, but Lily also planted tulips, snowdrops, and a variety of fruits (48-49). The family, just the two of them for Morgan's father had died when he was young, spent many hours in the garden and enjoyed watching the plants progress and the changing of seasons (50). Morgan's Aunt Monie often sent bulbs to him and once sent a gardener's apron with an attached note. It read, "I send you a gardener's apron for working in the garden, nothing will improve your appetite like being a gardener, and so intelligent as you are you will soon be...head man" (49). Like Roger, Morgan also tended his own small garden and also like Roger he grew tall red poppies (49). Gardening and immersion in the natural world that it entails played a significant and lasting role throughout Morgan's life. Ashby writes, "Their mutual passion for gardening was one of the bonds that held the family together" (50). Morgan recollected in his adulthood that the garden contained fauna as well as flora:

The garden was always overrun with animals... There were always hens and guinea-fowls. These we were used to, but also there was always a sample of whatever happened to be in the meadow...cows, calves and sheep...pigs, lambs, hens, ducks and guinea fowls. Add to these the occasional animals that strayed in from the road and the keeper's puppies that played in the back garden and you have a good idea what its appearance was (50).

This childhood exposure to gardening and the pleasure of nature likely influenced Morgan's future affinity for the countryside, specifically the desire to preserve it. He was the most outspoken member of the group in matters of nature conservation, ethical land development, and the complex relationship



15. Roger Fry: *The Poppies*, 1917

between man and nature. He was a member of several associations that expressed concern about industrialization and urbanization's effect on the British countryside and by extension the people living there. In keeping with the values of humanism, he believed in the basic goodness of people, eschewed the Christian doctrine of Original Sin, and used reason, instead of religion, to solve problems. He was extremely active in several humanist societies. He served as President of the Cambridge Humanists from 1959 until his death in 1970. He also served on the Advisory Council of the British Humanist Society. As early as the 1950's he served as Vice-President of The Ethical Union, a predecessor of the British Humanist Association. The Ethical Union was also concerned with animal welfare and the effects of industrialization. This devotion to preserving and helping to make the world a more humane place comes through in his many novels, stories, and essays.

Morgan wrote the allegorical "The Machine Stops" in 1909 to serve as a warning of the problems that progress and the new technology might bring with them, in particular, the destruction of nature. The rapid growth and industrialization happening at this time were major concerns for Morgan and his friends. This short story explores a future dystopian world where the earth is no longer capable of supporting life and the people live underground governed by the Machine, which provides every artificial means they need to survive. The story is a fictional exploration of what might happen if man progresses far enough not only to tame, but also ultimately to transcend nature, thereby destroying the earth. Morgan writes, "Night and day, wind and storm, tide and earthquake, impeded man no longer. He had harnessed Leviathan" (156).

Detached from the land and their natural environment, the residents become detached from each other. There is no more contact with the earth and its atmosphere. The protagonist Kuno's mother, Vashti, warns him as they communicate via the Machine's holographic network. She repeats what she has been taught, "The surface of the earth is only dust and mud, no life remains on it, and you would need a respirator, or the cold of the outer air would kill you. One dies immediately in the outer air" (148). Fear is used as a means to control the underground inhabitants. They are taught that survival is contingent upon complete obedience to the Machine and strict adherence to previous generations' traditions, irrational as they may be. The curious Kuno does not heed her advice to stay beneath ground and escapes into the outer atmosphere where he sees ferns, stars, and a sunset. For his blatant disobedience and his desire for forbidden knowledge, the others in the Machine judge him as sinful and expel him from their community. This is indubitably a reference to the Biblical Garden of Eden myth, so often represented in Bloomsbury stories and art.

Travelling by airship allowed the underground citizens to see the deforestation of the Himalayan Mountains and the ruins of previous civilizations. The attendant on the airship gives these developments a positive interpretation and attributes this destructive change to "progress." She announces, "We have indeed advanced, thanks to the Machine" (163). What they are told is progress, is pure propaganda that produces a self-imposed blissful ignorance. The Machine's citizens no longer know that the white stuff seen in the cracks of the Himalayan Mountains is snow. Even the golden sea and islands of the Mediterranean do not excite their senses; Vashti closes the metal window blind to hide the grandeur of Greece. As a result of this detachment from nature, humans lose

their connection to other people, as well as to the environment. They no longer touch each other; the custom had become obsolete due to their allegiance to and dependence on the Machine (161). Ultimately this disconnection brings about the demise of man and the destruction of everything, even their revered Machine. Morgan's message here is the same as the one that runs through his novel, *Howard's End*: Only connect. Only connect with each other and nature, or face the dire consequence of humanity's exploitation of the natural world. This story is also eerily prescient in introducing the idea of the Internet, Skype, Twitter, Facebook, and all other forms of social media that are proving to be a source of physical isolation for so many people today.

In his later years, Morgan wrote extensively about the English countryside in an effort to draw attention to its destruction by progress, growth, and development. *Abinger Pageant* (1934) is a play written to raise funds to save the countryside parish where he spent most of his life. Another pageant, *England's Pleasant Land* (1940), was a benefit for the Dorking and Leith Hill District Preservation Society. It was concerned with the rural deforestation that was taking place due to development. Many of his essays were written to bring awareness to modern environmental issues. In "The Challenge of Our Time" he writes about the countryside. Fertile agricultural land was being commandeered for the development of a satellite town for 60,000 people, while the previous owners were "doomed" and "living in a nightmare" having been expelled from their homes and in many cases, from the land that had belonged to their families for generations (58). This may appear to be irrelevant to my focal topic, fear of nature. However, by including this seemingly incongruent information I hope to show that Forster believed that fear of nature leads to a disconnection from nature, which in turn, makes it easy for people to

become desensitized to the importance, beauty, and necessity of natural areas. Or even worse than insensitive, they would become apathetic. Once this occurs, people will be willing to destroy nature; it will not be considered worth protecting for what is deemed progress. Thus, the message imparted in Morgan's essay was relevant not only when he wrote it, but also today. The same practice of forcing residents to sell their homes to make space for commercial development still occurs. Adding insult to injury, the monetary compensation that is offered to the residents is often not sufficient enough to find housing elsewhere. This is currently happening across our nation and, as Morgan said, "the previous owners are living in a nightmare" (58). His love of the countryside and concern for people is evident. A strong connection with the land on which you live creates the desire to respect, protect, and care for it. It is clear from his novels and other writings that Morgan, like his Bloomsbury friends, idealizes Mediterranean life. They spent many vacations in France, Spain, Greece, and Italy. They saw the natives in these countries as liberated and not repressed like the English. This may be due to the more relaxed views on sexuality, leisure time, and human emotion of these locales. I propose that the Bloomsberries also appreciated the Mediterranean inhabitant's vital connection with nature and to their ancestral lands.

One of Morgan's most significant short stories dealing with irrational fear of nature is "The Story of a Panic." In this story, Morgan presents a world where all hell breaks loose due to nature's dangerous, hypnotic, and seductive effect on unsuspecting man. It is set in one of the Bloomsberries favorite locales—the Italian countryside. The narrator, Mr. Tytler, is a Briton who is visiting Ravello with his wife and two daughters. They join a group of other British visitors for a picnic in the chestnut woods on a



cloudless May afternoon. One of the members of the group, Eustace, is a slothful, irritating teenager who will not participate in any of the outdoor activities, such as swimming because he is afraid of the water, and walking is too wearisome for him. He prefers to lie on the ground and whittle a whistle. While the others discuss the scenery, the benefits and consequences of felling trees in the forest, Nature Spirits of the forests, and whether or not the great God Pan is dead (9), Eustace finishes the whistle and begins to blow on it. First there is complete silence, and then an ominous wind begins to blow.

The narrator reports that it is not possible to describe coherently what happened next (11). However, he does tell us that all of his normal channels of sense and reason were blocked (12). Nature has the ability to sweep sensible people away into incoherence and unreasonable, paralyzing fear. He explains, “It was not the spiritual fear that one has known at other times, but brutal over-mastering physical fear, stopping up the ears, and dropping clouds before the eyes, and filling the mouth with foul tastes...for I had been afraid, not as a man, but as a beast” (12). He is literally scared senseless by Nature, as are most of the others. Once exposed to nature’s wiles, Eustace begins his transformation from a lazy, indolent fourteen year old to a wild, free-spirited, nature-loving animal.

It is interesting that Rose, the youngest member of the group, says that she almost didn’t run away like the others, besides Eustace, of course, when the wind began to blow. More telling is the sentence that explains what prompted her to finally do so: “I should have stopped, I do believe,” she continued, “if I had not seen Mama go” (14). The implication here is extremely clear. Fear of nature is learned; it is passed down through generations. The lower class, fisher-boy and hotel waiter, Gennaro, attests to this later in the story. He tells of the night many years ago that this same sort of rapturous nature

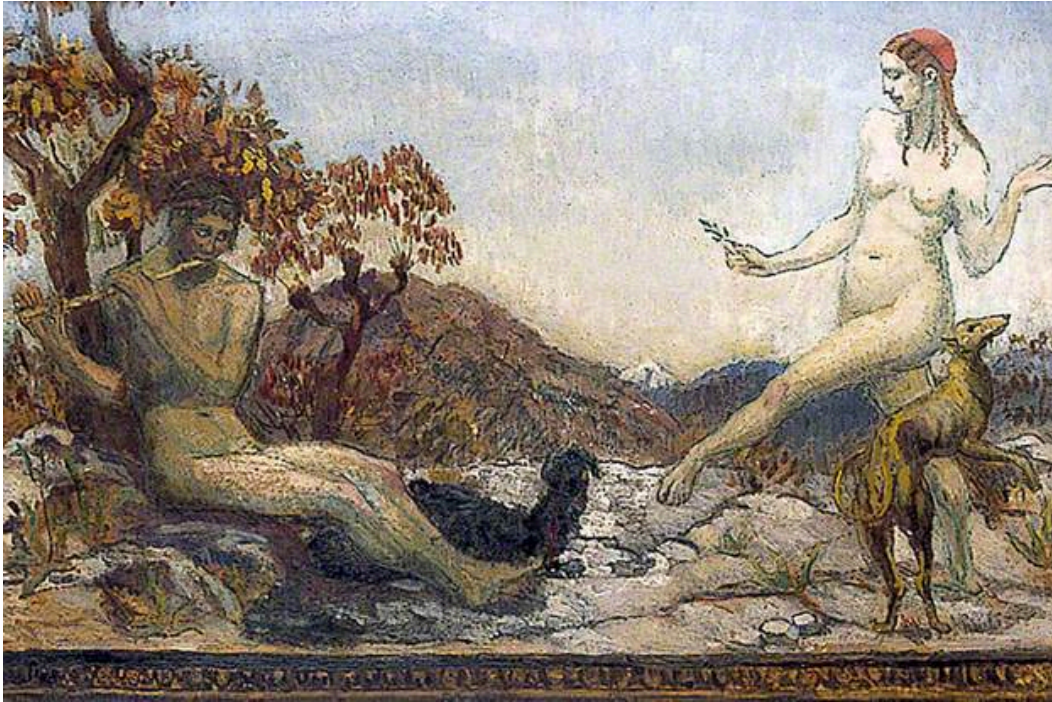
event happened to him. He claims that he survived only because he did not have parents or relatives to interfere, or try to tame him. Accordingly, when the spirit of nature called to him, as it did Eustace, he was free to run through the woods, climb rocks, and plunge into water. He implies that by giving into his Pan-induced animal nature and letting it run its course without undue restraint, he was able to endure and accomplish his desire (36). He begs Eustace's friends and family not to interfere; if they do, he will die (35). Our parents teach us to fear our animal nature, lest it induce "madness" as it did in Eustace and Gennaro. Madness, especially in the Victorian era and before, was thought to be a direct result of disobeying God or being possessed by the devil.

Mrs. Tytler admonishes Eustace for his apathetic response to what had just occurred. When she asks what he was doing while the others were running wildly through the forest, he says, "Oh; sitting or standing" (15). She yells, "Stood and sat doing nothing! Don't you know the poem 'Satan finds some mischief still for—'" (15). Nature's wild, untamed power is linked to evil and specifically that frightening, soul-stealing nemesis: The Devil.

Eustace ignores Mrs. Tytler and all of the others and begins to exclaim that he can understand almost everything. His consciousness has seemed to open up and expand. The one thing he cannot make out, even a little bit is man. It is only after he begins to connect closer to nature that he can no longer make out or understand man (29, 33). On the walk back to the hotel Eustace scurries along like a goat, in true Pan-like fashion. He stops to pick cyclamen and then presents them to three old women who appear suddenly by the wayside, having just walked down out of the woods. This moment foreshadows what will happen to Eustace in the end. He meets the Three Fates and gains their good favor by

giving one of them a kiss and flowers. Believing that he has gone completely mad, the others admonish him. He ignores them and as they continue on their way, one member of the mythological trio, the old woman whom he kissed, is heard murmuring blessings. When the men in the group drag him along the asphalt paths leading into the house, he claims his bedroom is now too small and doesn't have the view that he desires. He implores them to not make him stay in his bedroom. He says, "I can't see anything—no flowers, no leaves, no sky: only a stone wall" (27). He resents the fact that he is being enclosed. In the end, Eustace's wild nature prevails. He is last seen jumping over the parapet of the garden wall and running towards freedom.

Is it possible that Eustace's whistle called the nature gods out of their slumber and into a mischievous rendezvous with the group? What happens when nature is aroused and intervenes in the lives of sensible people? Can man experience nature and not be swept away in the frenzy? What is it that makes nature so dangerous? In true Bloomsbury fashion, Morgan uses this story to examine these questions and look for answers. Taming nature and controlling it within boundaries is a theme that Morgan revisits in his other short stories. Various other themes that he explores are nature wild versus nature tame, the use of fences, enclosures, locks, gates, and asphalt paths. These are all discussed in Morgan's short story, "Other Kingdom." It is similar to "The Story of a Panic" in its use of mythology, specifically the Daphne and Apollo story, and the protagonist's great desire to be allowed to be free in nature and not enclosed and "protected" from it. She escapes captivity as Daphne did, by appropriately changing into a tree in the forest.



16. Duncan Grant: *Arcadian Scene*, 1909

In the guise of Pan, nature is capable of seizing a sensible human being, inducing frenzy and uncontrollable urges, thereby creating a perceived threat to all humans. The danger that could occur if one would let nature possess them is, of course, purely absurd and unreasonable. However, this fear of nature, or lackadaisical indifference to it, is still seen today and contributes to the environmental degradation, overdevelopment, and excessive consumption that plague the earth and modern society. Morgan brilliantly satirizes this irrational attitude, much the same way Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart, and New Yorker cover artist, Barry Blitt, use their various mediums to satirize irrational thinking in today's culture.

Rather than believing that nature is dangerous, Morgan and the Bloomsberries believed that nature offers freedom from societal pressure to conform. You can be a little less civilized, i.e. less pretentious, less reserved, and more emotionally connected in a natural setting like the Mediterranean countryside, than in the city squares of London

with all of the portentous Victorian traditions and judgments. This raises the question: Is it better to live well in a civilized society without love or to be loved and not live quite so well in an uncivilized society. This theme is discussed in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, one of Morgan's best-known novels.

It is interesting to note that Morgan's collected tales are dedicated to a pagan god: Hermes Psychopompus—father of Pan, guider of souls, god of transitions and boundaries, and patron of literature and poets. Carl Jung believed Hermes was the guide into man's unconsciousness taking him into an inner journey of discovery, more specifically his shadow, or dark side—the underworld. Certainly these collected tales speak to that shadow which is nowhere darker in man, than his capability and willfulness to destroy his world, his fellow man, and himself. Morgan suggests that in light of a rapidly changing world—continual wars, nuclear weapons, disorganized transport, definite borders drawn on the map and the spirit—Hermes Psychopompus may be our best guide into an uncertain, but bleak future. He ends his introduction thus: Lightly built, he (Hermes Psychopompus) can anyhow stand in the prow and watch the disintegrating sea, the twisted sky (Forster *Coll. Tales* viii).

There are numerous other Bloomsbury tales warning of what happens when you try to tame the wild side of nature. All of the writers in the group at least experimented with these satirical tales of caution and what happens when one messes with Mother Nature.

Bunny Garnett also took up the nature wild versus nature tame theme in his story, *Lady Into Fox*. After a woman turns into a fox, she and her husband try to adjust to the situation. The fox-as-wife cannot be restrained in the house, she must run free; it is in her

vulpine nature. Problems ensue and ultimately end in her death. The story suggests that you cannot tame wild nature without causing serious repercussions and possibly even destruction and death. Bunny was also instrumental in teaching Vanessa's children first-hand about wild nature at Charleston Farmhouse. Quentin recalls in *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden* that Bunny taught them about nature and gave them a rudimentary notion of what was seen in the countryside around them. He also helped them to become reasonably knowledgeable naturalists (128). Bunny was also an "enthusiastic beekeeper" (48) and according to Mark Divall, family friend and Charleston's Head Gardener, it is said that Bunny carried a tiny mouse in his coat pocket (Divall). Many of Bunny's books deal with themes of animals, death, and the human-nature connection.

Virginia also wrote a story about an animal that experiences both freedom and restriction and much prefers the freedom. *Flush* is commonly viewed as a dichotomy between city life and country life. The main character, Flush, is a dog who after spending his early years running free in the countryside, is abruptly taken to live in London, the heart of civilization (35), with a frail, sickly Elizabeth Barrett. He spends most of his day lying on a sofa at Miss Barrett's feet. When he does go out, it is at the end of a short leash, which gets pulled harshly and often, especially when he tries to sniff all of the interesting new smells in Regent's Park. Flush willingly accepts the protection of the chain, though; the men in shiny top hats that march ominously down the paths frighten him. He shudders at the sight of them, but eventually begins to accept this situation as normal. He soon discovers, "The paths were no longer soft, but black and hard; the flowers were all massed far more thickly than at home; they stood, plant by plant, rigidly

in narrow plots” (38). The season passes into winter, but this means nothing to Flush, he is an inside dog now spending his day sleeping by the fire. Poor Flush, all of his natural instincts became thwarted and contradicted. Things change when Robert Browning comes into their lives, marries Elizabeth, and they all move to Italy. Once again, Flush runs free through the green grass, encountering wild pheasants and other dogs. And although he gets fleas in the process, this wild life of freedom is worth it. Nature does not provide Flush, or any living species, especially humans, with a Utopia. Something else miraculously happens; Flush realizes he doesn’t need the protection that his chain gave him in Regent’s Park. Virginia writes, “He was a friend of all the world now. All dogs were his brothers. He had no need of a chain in this new world; he had no need of protection” (125). She adds, more succinctly, “Fear was unknown in Florence” (126). Virginia could be addressing many issues with this allegorical story: women’s rights, class distinction, religious control, or even animal rights. For this paper, the issue I am addressing is the fear that is created when man tries to dominate and tame the natural, wild world. However, the same question would apply in each of the above situations—given the choice of being in nature wild and free or nature tame and controlled, which one is best? And what happens to the wild when it is trained to become tame? In this story, Virginia also brings up that favorite Bloomsbury topic—What exactly is civilization? It is a question that the Bloomsberries would discuss often and explore in their art. Whatever else it may be, Virginia certainly alludes to it being a place, perhaps not so organized and restrained; where men do not dress in proper attire; and dogs do not have to be led on chains. No, perhaps civilization is a tad shabby, happiness is of an utmost priority, and even if one occasionally gets fleas, he is permitted to live a life of

freedom. This is the opposite of common thought; civilization is usually associated with a well-ordered locale and the fear imparted to its citizens to keep it that way. The members of the Bloomsbury Group were anything but common thinkers.



*17. Lewes UK, 2013*



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **“Holding it all at the Moment”**

#### **A Conclusion**

In this paper I have explored two emotions that may be experienced within the natural world: fear and pleasure, and how Victorian culture encouraged one over the other. I have discussed the attitude of the Bloomsbury Group to these two emotional states and I have revealed what I believe to be their experience with nature and why they spent so much time thinking about, writing, and painting the external world that surrounds humans and that we have named nature. Many incentives led them towards living and creating art in the country.

First of all, it is extremely important to remember this was a group of young, middle- to upper-class, educated artists, writers, and political thinkers. These were not people who had to live in a rural atmosphere for survival; they chose this lifestyle as a means to escape the demands of civilization. They turned towards a more primitive lifestyle, and in turn gained more freedom and joy in their lives. The country life provided them with freedom to live life as they wished, away from proper society's customs, conventions, and mores. This freedom from society allowed them to create with abandon. Roger Fry's "An Essay in Aesthetics" emphasized experimentation and his teaching gave them full permission to experiment creatively with their art through the use of their imaginative lives. The unconstrained country life led to a greater freedom in painting and writing. Roger's advice allowed them to try out new ideas using abstraction, color, and innovative techniques. His legendary knowledge and enthusiasm for novel

ideas were contagious and I believe led to revolutionary ideas in his friends' literature, art, and more importantly, their lives. Nature inspired them and they worked closely with and within nature to create monumental works of art.

I also believe that the Bloomsbury Group had an intellectual sensitivity to nature. From their earliest childhood experiences to their mature years, they maintained the position that nature is not a thing to fear, to conquer, or to control. They used nature as a catalyst to facilitate their creative endeavors and to induce creative responses in their work. Theirs was not the nature worship of the Romantic artists, such as Wordsworth, who when Christianity began waning in England, simply replaced God with Nature. Nor did they believe as Rousseau did that the beauty and innocence of nature extended to man, and therefore natural man was virtuous, ie the noble savage (Clark *Civilization* 274). And most definitely, they did not equate nature with morality, and fallen man therefore, as immoral or sinful, as did some of the Christian sects and philosophies of the day. They had a healthy respect for their environment that was gained through reason, one of their guiding principles, and also through their proximity to nature. Theirs was an appreciation of nature to be experienced, with man being only a part of the whole.

Perhaps they were all born with a disposition to respond positively to nature or maybe their unique group experience allowed a bond to form to encourage these experiences. Their relationship not only with nature, but all of life is what makes them so appealing to study. They are diverse, intellectual, complex, and therefore, misunderstood. I do not believe that they intended to be revolutionaries or planned to pave the way for future rebellious generations of artists and writers. They were simply living their own truths and seeking out new ideas for their own contentment. They were experimenting not

only with their work, but their lives, as well. They were not only trying to make a living as artists, but they were also consciously making their lives.



*18. Bloomsbury Friends*

According to prominent garden writer Michael Pollan, there is a distinct difference between the naturalist and the gardener, “Compared to the naturalist, the gardener never fell head over heels for nature. The gardener has learned, perforce, to live with her ambiguities—that she is neither all good, nor all bad, that she gives as well as takes away” (228-229). By this definition, none of the Bloomsberries were naturalists, but some certainly were gardeners. While they each experienced nature differently, their attitudes toward nature were similar. They viewed man as an element of nature, not outside of, nor controlling nature.

Living in the countryside also permitted them to live close to the rhythms of nature. They write about and paint scenes of the seasons, in great detail. Their myriad letters to each other swap stories of the day’s weather, the weather to come, and events of past weather. They were sensitive to and attuned to the changing seasons. Nature was

incorporated into their everyday lives in the country, including the children's lives. I suggest that anyone who seriously studies the Bloomsbury Group must come near to the same conclusion that I have. In her book, *The Art of Dora Carrington*, Jane Hill described Ham Spray, Carrington and Lytton's last country home, as a "Complete way of life; a haven and refuge; a place of work and festivity; a place of rest but also a place of inspiration" (91-92). Carrington and her Bloomsbury friends fostered a deep sense of place in their homes, gardens, and the surrounding countryside.

Although decisively pragmatic, the Bloomsberries were also very open-minded. They were able to remain agnostic while also being very tolerant of religions and philosophies. In their homes, there are a variety of religious symbols. For example, on my visit to Charleston, I saw a statue of Kuan Yin, the Chinese goddess of mercy, on the mantle; a god of the earth statue that Julian brought back from China; paintings of mythological figures; and Pagan and Christian themed paintings. They led moral lives without the aid of an overseer God. And yet, Duncan wanted to be buried in the churchyard. He and Vanessa would be buried side-by-side in the churchyard in nearby Firle.

Duncan's granddaughter, Henrietta shared with me some interesting thoughts on death, a most important aspect of nature that may attest to some of what the Bloomsberries believed. She said, "We know that death is not a place. But, we don't know what death is. Sure there are lots of books written on death, but by whom? The living, who by the way, have never experienced it themselves" (H. Garnett). I conclude that this is another occasion where the paradox, perhaps mystery, comes in regarding the Bloomsberries. Specifically, the mystery that Henrietta and I spoke about. She said,

“Duncan believed in the mystery. He told me one evening when we were huddled up close to the fire, ‘Best not to talk about these things with the others. Keep them to yourself’” (H. Garnett).

In light of Leonard’s obvious knowledge of environmental issues and his political stance on justice and peace, it was surprising and disturbing to me to learn that he owned stock in imperial ventures such as Shell Oil, Federated Selangor Rubber, and Ceylon Para Rubber Company (Lee 557). After much consideration and thoughtful contemplation, I came to a realization concerning not only Leonard, but also all of the Bloomsbury friends. I think it is time to stop either mythologizing or demonizing them. They were a group of humans with a genuine love of the natural world and concerns about its destruction. As writers, they shared their concerns in books; as artists they preserved the beauty of the natural world on canvas. And as friends they had discussions about nature, and her problems, in person and in letters. Their works show an unquestionable interest in the relationship between humans and nature.

Seemingly incongruous findings concerning the Bloomsbury Group are best and most succinctly explained by Vanessa’s grandson, Julian Bell. In a conversation with him at his Lewes, UK artist studio he said of his family, “People are complex psychological systems” (J. Bell).

One could go on endlessly with the theme of nature and gardens in the oeuvres of the Bloomsbury painters and writers. It certainly warrants a close examination. However, are painting, discussing, and writing about environmental concerns enough?

I think what Leonard has to say about ideas can be applied to the Bloomsberries concern for the natural world: “It is, too, a muddled delusion to think that ideas are less

real than power, economics, or geography or that they have been and will be less potent instruments in the making of man's history" (L. Woolf *Principia* 19).

It is also this world of ideas and imagination that Virginia claims is her best method of bringing awareness and change to causes she believes in. Writing in *The Platform of Time* concerning the Spanish Civil War she explains, "My natural reaction is to fight intellectually: if I were any use [to the cause of liberty] I should write against it [the war]. . . . The moment force is used, it becomes meaningless & unreal to me" (28). It is through the pen and paper that she feels she is most effective against tyranny.

The Bloomsberries' ideas about nature started on paper and canvas and extended to a wide audience. Virginia was a proto-environmentalist as well as a proto-feminist. Her writing and correspondence should be ranked among those of Rachel Carson and Aldo Leopold. If they had lived longer lives, Virginia would have reviewed *The Sea Around Us*, *Silent Spring*, and *A Sand County Almanac* as enthusiastically as she did *Walden*. Leonard and Morgan would have included these authors among their many correspondents, raising awareness of the environmental dangers that the world was soon to experience. Clive and Roger would have written environmental protest pamphlets published by Hogarth Press. Roger with all of his brilliant displays of energy and ingenuity would have written about the importance of gardens to personal landscapes and home sites. Or perhaps, he would have added to the scientific conversation concerning global warming and climate change. Maynard Keynes would have explained how population growth played a crucial role in urbanization, industrialization, and environmentalism. Today with the environmental dangers of nuclear waste and fracking

neglected by powerful corporations, the Bloomsbury Group would have been enraged and sought justice by whatever means necessary.

We know that the Bloomsbury Group was strongly influenced by G.E. Moore's philosophy and that several members were his students at Cambridge University (Lee 209). Moore taught that the two most worthy things in life are human relationships and the contemplation of beautiful objects. They must have listened very well and took his message to heart. Where else in history does one find such an extensively devoted long-lasting group of friends who enjoyed time together in their beautiful gardens in the English countryside? Indeed, nature played a huge role in the lives of the Bloomsbury Group and was always of utmost importance.

Virginia wrote an article on Thoreau commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth for the Times Literary Supplement. She emphasizes several things that she values about the way he lived his life. She writes, "Living with the herd and adopting habits that suit the greater number is a sin—an act of sacrilege. What has civilisation to give, how can luxury improve upon these simple facts? 'Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!' is his cry" (V. Woolf *Essays* 132-140). She called him a noble rebel and a wild man who would never allow himself to be a tame one. She appreciated that he "let life take its own way unfettered by artificial restraints" and "by laboring for forty days he could live at leisure for the rest of the year" (132-140). Perhaps she felt a kinship with Thoreau, or at least his ideas—a longing for a simple life lived close to nature and not living for society's approval. Thoreau's life reflects many of the ideals of the Bloomsbury Group.

During 2012-2013, I visited Charleston Farmhouse, Monk's House, Berwick Church, and various London locations that have significance to the Bloomsbury Group.

In 2013 I was fortunate to meet with Bloomsbury family and friends in London and East Sussex. They welcomed me into their homes and artist's studios and were very willing to share stories with me about their families and friends. Although their generosity was more than I could have ever imagined, I would not have expected less from the descendants of the Bloomsberries.

The most appropriate way that I know of to end a paper in which there is so much more to be said about the topic is to use yet another timely quote from the ever-eloquent, always articulate Virginia:

I don't often trouble now to describe cornfields and groups of harvesting women in loose blues and reds and little staring yellow frocked girls. But that's not my eyes' fault: coming back the other evening from Charleston, again all my nerves stood upright, flushed, electrified (what's the word?) with the sheer beauty—beauty abounding and superabounding, so that one almost resents it, not being capable of catching it all and holding it all at the moment. (V. Woolf *Diary* *V*. 3 158).

By “holding it all at the moment”—beauty, friendship, art, and nature—The Bloomsbury Group created lives of meaning and purpose with far-reaching influences. Their multidisciplinary work remains relevant today and the world is a richer place for having had them here.



## ILLUSTRATIONS

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